ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY INTERVIEWS WITH MARSHALL WILSON

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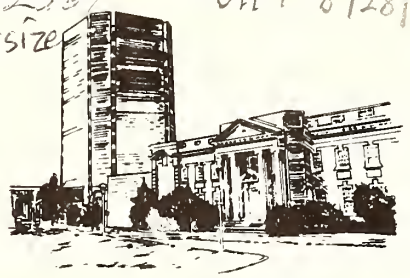

ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

INTERVIEW WITH MARSHALL WILSON

APRIL 10, 1970

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PLACE Knoxville, Tenn.

DATE April 10, 1970

Marshall A. Wilson

(Interviewee) MARSHALL A. Wilson

Charles W Crawford

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives of the John Willard Brister Library of Memphis State University)

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THIS IS MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE PROJECT: "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY." THE DATE IS APRIL 10, 1970. THE PLACE IS KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. MARSHALL WILSON, FORMERLY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AT MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Wilson, I think it will be well to start, if you would, by getting on the record some sort of summary of your life before you became associated with TVA. If you would start with when and where you were born and then give us some information about your early life, education, and previous experience that would be valuable.

MR. WILSON: I was born in Knox County in 1901, lived most of my life in Knoxville, graduated from a Knoxville high school, attended Maryville College for two years, took some courses at George Peabody College in Nashville and the UMCA graduate school in Nashville, plus further extension courses at the University of Tennessee. Although I did not get a degree, I have more

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) than enough credits, numerically, than would be required for a degree. And I might say here that one of the greatest things I think TVA ever did was not to hold particular prejudices against a person because he did not have a degree. As you may recall, Dr. A. E. Morgan himself had no ordinary degree.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir.

MR. WILSON: I don't know to what degree that influenced the TVA policy, but TVA's policy was that you should have an education equivalent perhaps to a college degree. In other words, they were concerned with a person's education and training prior to employment. But the mere fact of a degree was not a controlling factor, and as a result of that I was personally acquainted with a great many such people in TVA who, in my opinion, were at least equally capable to others and I think TVA profited from that policy.

My whole background since 1776 has been in East Tennessee. Eight of my ancestors served in the Revolutionary war, so I'm particularly interested and concerned about the

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) welfare of my country. And for that reason partly, I was so very much enthused with the idea of TVA developing this region. I had a very personal interest in it.

In May, 1924, I was employed by the Knoxville YMCA as a boys work secretary and later a young men's program director for the YMCA, and came from the YMCA to the TVA in August of 1933. I was one of the first three or four native Tennesseans, I think, employed by TVA. I assisted Dr. Reeves and Dr. Morgan in establishing the first offices and renting the first office space in Knoxville; was first employed as an assistant to Dudley Dawson who was, I think, Assistant Director of Personnel and Training.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. I talked with Mr. Dawson last summer in Ohio.

MR. WILSON: You did? Good.

DR. CRAWFORD: If we could go back a little before you started with TVA, Mr. Wilson, what and when was your first contact with TVA?

MR. WILSON: Soon after May '33 when the TVA Act was passed I read in the newspaper that Arthur Morgan was appointed the first chairman. I immediately wrote a letter to him, indicating my interest and concern in the possibilities of TVA and expressing the hope that I might have some part in this program.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in May of '33?

MR. WILSON: That was soon after May. The TVA Act was passed on the 17th of May. I would say that it was within a week after the public announcement of Dr. Morgan's appointment. I had a very nice response and a little bit later a telegram from Dr. Morgan that he was to arrive in Knoxville and he would appreciate seeing me at the hotel and to help him find some office space.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when that was, sir, and what hotel?

MR. WILSON: Farragut Hotel.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would have been in the summer, of course, of '33?

MR. WILSON: That was in the summer of '33, and I was still employed by the YMCA. As I recall, I was placed on the payroll of TVA in the last week of August, but had worked with TVA for two weeks prior to that. I don't remember the day. My first assignment was with Dr. Dawson, and his primary interest was in selecting key personnel for the training aspect of TVA's personnel program. I suppose it is well known what that program was to consist of. The idea was that there should be opportunities given to the outstanding young men in all the counties of the valley, to come at that time to Norris on a combination work and training program. The idea was that they would work part time and take vocational training classes in the other. I was appointed as one of a small group and I was to cover twenty-five counties in East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, establishing committees to advise the TVA on the selection of personnel. These committees--shall I go into that matter--how these committees were sponsored, unless you already have that?

DR. CRAWFORD: No, sir. Let's get that information if we can.

MR. WILSON: All right. We were asked to contact the superintendents of education, the county agricultural agents in all cases and, in most cases, the principal bankers, county judge, other public officials, plus prominent business people. Generally, the rule was that the superintendent of education would be the most valuable source to us in selecting outstanding young people who would profit from this training at TVA and would return to their counties. The hope was that they would return to the counties. The emphasis was placed upon that rather than being trained for positions elsewhere in the country.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of training were they to receive?

MR. WILSON: Primarily vocational training in agriculture, arts and crafts, but also mechanics and various kinds of construction trades. There was to be bookkeeping and other clerical-type training, but the emphasis, I think, was on vocational training in the crafts and in agriculture.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was TVA to profit from service of these trainees in any way, or was this simply an attempt to develop the region by training people? Did TVA expect to hire any of these people?

MR. WILSON: Oh yes, definitely. The great hope was that it would have these people in its employ for some years, particularly in the construction of dams and reservoirs and other improvements. But eventually they would be better prepared to take their place in the regular civic life of their communities.

DR. CRAWFORD: How successful was this program in your view, Mr. Wilson? Did many of these people go into the TVA construction work?

MR. WILSON: A great many of them did. I think it is rather important to note that the program did not materialize to the degree and the extent that was hoped. There were reasons for that. I think one of them was the economic pressure of employment, to get people jobs so they could earn money. That was one point of view. Another was that from the construction point

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) of view there was not enough patience shown on the part of the construction engineers in dealing with these training programs.

DR. CRAWFORD: I suppose they wanted to get people to work in a hurry, didn't they?

MR. WILSON: They wanted capable people in a hurry, those who had experience and who could get the job done. They did not oppose the training, certainly, except that they did not want any training to interfere with their production.

DR. CRAWFORD: How widespread was this program and what places did you have it under way?

MR. WILSON: My personal experience was only in Norris, to a limited extent. Of course, we were taking over the Wilson Dam reservations and there may have been something there, but I don't know what activities were taking place at that time outside the Norris area. In this selection program, I might indicate, we were instructed particularly not to invite people on the basis of political patronage or political choice. Even the members of the committees to a limited

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) extent were not to be politicians, although they were public office holders, many of them, and that was of course unavoidable and essential.

DR. CRAWFORD: Since you worked with people in the counties?

MR. WILSON: Yes, it was simply working through the people in the counties. You couldn't avoid that but I do recall many occasions in meeting with these committees that when we spoke of personnel employment I was laughed at--when I mentioned that we wanted no political endorsement. We would like these people without any information being given to us as to what political affiliation they had. Many times they said you simply can't do it. A government agency cannot come in and employ and operate without political advantages. Of course this was a Democratic administration and the area which I covered was Republican, and strongly Republican, particularly in the East Tennessee part. Southwest Virginia was considerably more Democratic.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have forms to fill out, personnel

DR. CRAWFORD: (Cont'd) forms, listing qualifications?

MR. WILSON: Not at that time. No, we had no type of form. We invited letters of reference, and at that time (I am speaking now of the original establishment of these committees and getting them to work.) we were not employing people for study. We were getting ready to employ them, getting candidates for jobs whom we could interview at some later time.

Now when the program started I am sure Mr. Dawson would be your best source of information on that record at the present time. Part of my job in Mr. Dawson's office was going through applications, letters from people who were writing in wanting employment, and making some selection. He made the final decisions, of course, but I thinned them out--some of the better candidates.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have far more applicants than you could take?

MR. WILSON: Yes, a great many more, and this was bothering me in this position with Mr. Dawson's

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) outfit. At my request I transferred to the employment division under Carl Richey, who was then Assistant Director of Personnel. So my activity became that of a new field employer--an interviewer--and in that case things were exciting and (I don't know how to describe it) a very difficult job. As people wrote in and were selected through a process of weeding out the least desirable applicants and interviewing the others, we sent notices to them to meet a field interviewer in a certain town at a certain date and to bring this card for identification.

DR. CRAWFORD: How many field interviewers did you use at that time?

MR. WILSON: I believe there were five or six over the valley. Most of my area was again limited to East Tennessee, although it ran as far as from Chattanooga to Bluefield, Virginia. Many times I would send invitations for interviews to a town, perhaps forty or fifty invitations, and driving into the town there would be hundreds to thousands of people waiting and hoping for an interview. In many cases I had to get

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) the assistance of the sheriff to help control the crowds. Occasionally I would go into a town and go to the hotel, and would never get sleep all night because of people knocking at my door, people standing in the hotel lobbies, standing around the courthouses and occasionally in post offices. Occasionally interviews were held in banks or most any place that they would give me a desk and a space where I could interview. And those places were filled with people.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you handle this overflow of crowds? Did you try to interview all people who came?

MR. WILSON: No, we couldn't attempt to. Although in most cases we did interview people who were not invited. We did not by any means limit it but we were restricted simply by time and energy because we were completely exhausted, interviewing all day long. I've interviewed several hundred people in one day, which was not the best way to interview. However, construction people were wanting men and they wanted them in a hurry.

DR. CRAWFORD: What things did you look for in the interviews?

MR. WILSON: To begin with we looked for that young person who had promise, potentials. We were looking for potential, and that's where we began getting into trouble. We put potentiality sometimes ahead of direct working experience in a particular trade. Remember we were then trying to employ in this work, workers on construction. Our field was very much limited to that type of people, but not without exception. If we had a good secretary or a good bookkeeper or a good accountant, something in that field, of course we took note. And sometimes we could make particular remarks and send that report back to the office. We did not extend the employment as signed employment contracts with the clerical people; that was done in Knoxville. And when these people came in for a visit or interview if we discovered a very promising person we would send that in with a very special note to an interviewer in Knoxville. But in the fields we would have a requisition for a certain number of people. They needed seven

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

electricians and four bulldozer operators, and jackhammer operators, and so forth. And if we could find them we would immediately employ them and send them to Norris.

Now, in those interviews, I think (this is to me a significant thing) almost inevitably we had political patronage dealers who wanted to see the field interviewer. And I had some very interesting experiences in those fields. We had a United State Congressman from East Tennessee who got me out of bed at 10 o'clock at night and wanted to talk with me. I agreed to have him come to my office and he explained his position. He said, "I have here a list of names of people that I want you to employ." I told him, "I cannot accept your list of people that you want me to employ. I do not want to turn down any of your friends or people that you have who are capable of doing the work. My job then is to find out how much of your references to this person is from your personal knowledge of his ability as against your knowledge of his political interest." I said, "That imposes upon me a judgment that is very, very difficult so I would prefer not

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) to receive your letters--not to receive your recommendations. But if you know a person who is capable of doing a particular job from your own knowledge, I will not hold against him the fact that the recommendation came from you." An interesting result of that conversation was that this Congressman complimented me very highly, wished me well, wished the TVA well in its program, but he again, like many others, said he would like to have a word. He said, "Now, Mr. Wilson, I'm going to continue to send these letters." He said, "from my point of view I can't refuse one of my followers a reference. I would like to continue to write you letters. (He invariably sent a copy to the applicant). If I don't hear anything from them I will understand why." And so we left friends. Subsequently I had several contacts with him and with his field and local representatives, and they were always cordial, and there was never any bitterness.

DR. CRAWFORD: That seems rather remarkable that you were able to handle that and not lose the good will of the politician.

MR. WILSON: I thought it was too. In fact I found that particular politician came up in my estimation. Because knowing the pressures he was under, from his point of view, he must operate in that way. On the other hand, I had to operate in another way. But we agreed that we should each handle it in our own way, without trying to embarrass the other. I think that was the way to do it. However, there is one . . . May I mention just another little incident of the same kind? I was once having interviews in Lafollette with a large group of people, and a local politician, as a county official, came to the door. I had never seen this man before; I had heard of him. He came to the door of the small room in which I was interviewing individuals and knocked. I opened it. He introduced himself in a very loud voice and said, "oh, Mr. Wilson, my old buddy. I'm so glad to see you. Now, Marshall," he said, (I don't know where he got my first name) "I've got seventeen or more people out here in this crowd that I want you to employ." And he said, "I have told these boys to be here and now I am

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) counting on you to do it." And he pushed himself into my office and closed the door. I opened the door and pushed him out of the door into the crowd and I said, "let me have your attention please. I never saw this man before in my life. This man has not recommended any of you to me personally and a political reference to this man will not be considered." And I returned to my room, after pushing him out.

DR. CRAWFORD: You made a public announcement?

MR. WILSON: I made a public announcement that this man was not having any influence upon my activities in selecting people. I later had difficulties with this particular man in a personal way, but I won't go into that. But that situation did not work out as favorably as it did with the Congressman.

DR. CRAWFORD: How, generally, did you handle this political pressure for employment? What form did you usually follow?

MR. WILSON: There was an understanding, at least with our employment officers, that certain references would be sent in to the Knoxville office. When we received letters that were clearly indicated as from a person with political influence we would not even open the letters, and sent them in to our director of employment. If, on the other hand, we opened the letter and saw that it wasn't a political endorsement we merely folded it up and sent it in to the office. We would not attempt to answer any of those ourselves. Just what happened to them in our Knoxville office I wouldn't want to say, but there was a political influence of that kind exerted upon TVA. But let me say this, because I think I owe it to TVA. I have known a few employees of TVA who had previously held political office or had been employed in the office of a Congressman, but to my knowledge that person never tried to influence anyone politically while he was employed by TVA. And to the extent that I could ever determine, he was not employed because of any political influence. Now we do know that Senator McKellar and certain others did attempt to influence TVA many times. Some

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) higher officials will have to tell you whether or not he was successful in that.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know that he seemed very unhappy with TVA, and very frustrated that he did not get some people appointed.

MR. WILSON: That is certainly true.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you spend a great deal of time away from Knoxville in this field interviewing?

MR. WILSON: Yes. Most of my time was away from Knoxville. I would usually come back to Knoxville on weekends because my family was here, but most of the time I was in the field. I established an office in Norris and interviewed many of the United States Engineer's employees who wanted to transfer to TVA and come on the TVA payroll. I interviewed a hundred or more of those. In one year I interviewed over twenty thousand people. I don't remember now the number of employees, but I made a study of this at one time--the number of interviews I had and the number of people employed. I think the number of people

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) employed was about one out of four, but the majority of the trades people at the Norris project, I am sure, accounted for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you travel for TVA? Did you have a TVA car? Did you have a travel account?

MR. WILSON: I had a travel account; used my own car at five cents a mile. Occasionally I used a rented car and sometimes TVA owned cars, in the very early days.

DR. CRAWFORD: Can you tell me something, although this is going back in time just a bit, from the very beginning of TVA, as to how it was put together? What impressions do you have? What do you remember about your first meeting in the Farragut Hotel with A. E. Morgan at the time that TVA faced the problem of getting office space and other things here in Knoxville?

MR. WILSON: I recall a Ray Crittenden, a Knoxville native. He and I were employed about the same time and we met together, I believe, in Dr. Morgan's hotel room. And we had told him of a previous contact we had made with B. H.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) Sprankle in the Sprankle Building, and that he might be able to work out some office arrangements there. We walked over to the Sprankle Building. Now I am not sure that I introduced him to Mr. Sprankle; I knew Mr. Sprankle right well. It could have been that I did because I had dealings with him before. And there were two or three other persons whom I don't remember by name, who came with Dr. Morgan, and I am pretty sure that it was they who finally worked out the arrangements and not Dr. Morgan personally. And I am sure Dr. Dawson came here with him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who was with him, Ray Crittenden?

MR. WILSON: Ray Crittenden. John Ray Crittenden, I believe.

DR. CRAWFORD: What has happened to him since?

MR. WILSON: He is now deceased. Ray became Chief Budget Officer within the Department of Reservoir Property Management, which is now called the Division of Reservoir Properties. At first he was one of those personnel

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

interviewers. He had a territory similar to my East Tennessee territory in establishing these committees to work with TVA, then interviewing applicants. From there he and I both went to the Employment Division under Carl Richey at about the same time. Then there was a gap in my understanding between that time and the next, although I know Mr. Crittenden had some difficulty and was terminated, I believe, for a very short period. And incidentally, I was terminated also. I think this is an interesting little story.

I was terminated, I think because I criticized Dr. Reeves. Dr. Reeves had had experience with one of the military services, I believe it was the Navy, in World War I, in devising questionnaires on general qualifications. He was a very strong advocate of that method of selecting employees. We had to work with examination forms and we had groups of people meeting to take examinations. And then after they took the examinations we would select those with the highest score and they were the first ones to be called for an interview. It produced a lot of very intelligent, bright boys for

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) TVA, without doubt. On the other hand, I felt, and so did Mr. Crittenden, that we were somewhat in the middle between theorists in the personnel department and the construction superintendents on dams. We were constantly criticized for sending young bright boys to the job, to do work that they had never done before. They had learned how to be electricians by sitting in a classroom. The construction men said, "I want a man who can rewind this armature. I want a man who can handle high voltage lines and produce work on construction."

I wrote a very long memorandum, of which I still have a copy, to Mr. Richey, my supervisor, stating that I thought there should be more balance between the working examination score and the employment--that there should be an additional test over and above the paper intelligence type of test that we were using to select men. I was rather critical, I would say, of the deficiency, not that the examinations were bad or not useful. As far as they went, they were very good. But they needed something additional, something more--another test as to a man's capabilities

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

before turning him loose handling a five-thousand-dollar bulldozer. And I did not propose a solution, but said that study should be given to working out those solutions.

Within a week from the time I sent that memorandum to him, he called me into his office and said, "Mr. Wilson, you are a fool." He said, "nobody but a damned fool has ever written a memorandum of this kind." He said, "You're just all wrong and I don't think we have any further use for you in TVA." I said, "Is it because of my writing this memorandum?" He said, "No, the job you were employed to do is about completed. I don't think we will need your job anymore." I immediately left his office and went to the employment office and found a requisition for a person as an interviewer in the same position that I had. I got a copy of that and returned it to Mr. Richey, saying "You said my job ended; that I am being discharged because my job has ended. Can you explain this requisition for replacement?" Mr. Richey (tears came to his eyes) said, "I can't discuss it any more with you." I said, "has Dr. Reeves seen this memorandum?"

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

He said, "No." I said, "then I have a copy of it. I am going to take my copy to Mr. Reeves." He said, "No, let me send this one." I said, "that is what you should have done in the first place. But I am going to give you the opportunity because that is the correct channel. If it is taken to Mr. Reeves, you take it--not me."

A few days later (I was still on the job) I had a call from Mr. Reeves to come to his office. He said, "I read this thing. I don't agree with you. I think this scheme in the long run and in the far-distant future, will produce the best result for TVA." "Well," he said, "I admire the fact that you wrote it. I don't want to hold it against you." He said, "I understand that you are leaving the TVA. How much annual leave do you have?" I said, "well, I have about two weeks." He said, "before the two weeks are out there will be another job for you in TVA." He said, "come back and see me" on a certain date. I came back that day and he offered me a position which was a promotion over the previous position I had. And since then I worked another nineteen years, almost.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the position he had for you at that time?

MR. WILSON: Aide in Public Relations was the title--to work primarily with Dr. H. A. Morgan in answering complaints that Dr. Morgan, being a local man and a well-known East Tennessean, former president of the University, received--a great many complaints. Largely in two fields; one was that the people were not being offered enough for their land. The land buyers weren't treating them fairly. The other was the graves and the cemeteries--a great deal of disturbance about them.

The Campbell County Baptist Association adopted a resolution condemning TVA for wanting themselves to remove the cemeteries and graves. They pointed out the difference between the church and the state, and that they should never have anything to do with each other--that if there were any graves to be moved that it should never be done by the government. It was a church affair and the people should be allowed to take care of them themselves. Well, I don't remember seeing that particular resolution but there was a signed resolution

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) to that effect. There were complaints from that source and there were some complaints from the Methodists, but principally from the Baptists. They were united in opposition to some of the methods that TVA was taking--not necessarily opposing TVA per se, in its total program. It was this particular activity in TVA that they were concerned about--moving their dead.

DR. CRAWFORD: When did you start this new work, Mr. Wilson?

MR. WILSON: I suspect it was in the latter part of '34. It might have been the spring of '35. TVA had employed a man previously to work in this field of population readjustment and grave removals--a man who was not well accepted by the people of the Norris area. He left TVA to go with, I believe, the Rural Rehabilitation Administration, RRA. I remember an anecdote here, in starting on his job. . . (I don't know whether I am getting this all clear, or not.)

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir, that's good.

MR. WILSON: I met with Dr. H. A. Morgan and Mr. John Ferris in their office. They were explaining the delicate nature of the public relations work in an area where people were already fearful. Incidently, there was a very strong feeling that a Democratic administration would not do anything to help these Republican people in East Tennessee. They were looked upon with suspicion. People were afraid. I'm speaking about the local farmers and people in the rural area. That was really one facet of the delicate nature of this work. But I remember John Ferris making the remark that "this is a job that you will have to handle with kid gloves." And then he said, "but don't wear spats."

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did they select you for that work? Because you knew the area and were an East Tennessean?

MR. WILSON: I think it was because of that. I was a native of East Tennessee. I had taught school in rural communities. I had traveled quite a bit throughout the East Tennessee counties, organizing clubs in high schools--

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) Hi-Y clubs for the YMCA, particularly. But I discovered that I was accepted more because of my name, perhaps, than any other reason. The woods are full of Wilsons. It was a common name. The ice breaker that I could use most effectively was: "My name is Wilson. I am a native of East Tennessee. I live in Knoxville. I am out here to talk to you." And there was, many, many times, an obvious relaxation, the sigh of restfulness, when I met these people. It was very obvious to see. I was surprised to discover that it was so effective--the way I introduced myself as a local person.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were they afraid of dealing with outsiders?

MR. WILSON: Very definitely. There was a definite prejudice against any foreigner who might come into this territory, and that was one of the fears against the Democrats. They had been reading in the papers where these Democrats from Chicago, New York, and Washington were coming down into East Tennessee to tell us how to get along--how we should

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) feel, and what we must do--to give us directions and to save our souls and our pocketbooks. There was that suspicion very strongly. I'll say this, not so much from personal knowledge but from rumor, that the United States Army Engineers with their original surveys for the Norris project had run rather roughshod over many of the people. They would walk across the fields, let down their gates, let their cattle out, and give them short answers to any questions that were asked. They were surveyors who did not want to say why they were doing it. They were just running these lines; that was all. And the people weren't satisfied with the answers and they weren't satisfied that these people wouldn't spend their time sitting down on their haunches and then whittling with them. They were too busy. Many of the people who came in had strange sounding names. They were foreigners to these people and they were reluctantly accepted. Now that was a very outstanding feature.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you handle these complaints? Did you try to deal with anybody by writing a letter? Did you go out to see them yourself?

MR. WILSON: Most of my work was personal contacts rather than the letters. We had letter writers in Knoxville offices. Dr. Morgan frequently wrote letters. A great many of his letters said, "I imagine Mr. Wilson will come and see you," and he would send me a copy of the letter. But in all my interviews I never had a rough time with anybody. We disagreed. There was not always an easy feeling, but we always left friendly and with a handshake.

We had a particular case with a Mr. Rosenbaum, in the upper Norris area. TVA was going to flood all around him and leave his little business, a merchandising store, stranded on a peninsula. The highway was going to be rebuilt away from his place. The water would come up on two sides of it. He felt that he was entitled to damages. But under the law that was consequential damage which could not be compensated for. He made quite an issue and went to the newspapers and there was a lot of furor about it and we never satisfied Mr. Rosenbaum. We never satisfied him, but he always had my deepest sympathy. He was really distressed; he was economically deprived because of the

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) TVA operations. But fortunately some of his neighbors profited by the very fact that the new road would be located near them. And TVA said, "well, it's his bad luck and their good luck. We can't do anything about it." And those consequential damages, to a lesser extent I think, were felt and were often expressed throughout the whole valley. Rosenbaum was the most outstanding case that I recall.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had you known Harcourt Morgan before you went to work for TVA?

MR. WILSON: Yes. Dr. Morgan was my Sunday school teacher in this church for many years. I had never attended school with him, or in any class, or anything of that kind.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have an opportunity to get to know him well?

MR. WILSON: Yes. I knew him quite well. Not as well as a great many other people. But I was somewhat complimented, you might say flattered, that he sometimes called me into

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) his office to talk about generalities, about TVA as a whole, about what we were doing to the people in the valley. Were we really making the impressions that we wanted to make? I had many conversations with him in that regard. You may have a record of it already, but Dr. Morgan in his later days with TVA wrote a book called Common Mooring. He wrote a paper. You have heard of Common Mooring?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir.

MR. WILSON: It was very difficult for me. In fact, I regret that he invited my comments on that article, but he did. He wanted me to review, to register my views, to criticize it. I was invited to criticize it in any way that I cared to, but I could not and would not offer him my honest criticism. I mean the whole criticism because I did not feel that I should do so.

DR. CRAWFORD: He had a great deal of difficulty saying what he wanted to, I know.

MR. WILSON: Yes, he did. Much of what he did say was trite, obvious, axiomatic. The people would have accepted him, but some of his conclusions from those obvious facts and situations were rather difficult to understand. I could not feel that he made a great contribution to the culture of knowledge in his article.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well . . .

MR. WILSON: I don't say that I don't believe in a common mooring, because I do.

DR. CRAWFORD: As you know, the other two original directors are still living; he alone is gone, so I have had difficulty getting a good account of his place in the development of TVA. I've talked to Neal Bass and John Ferris and I will talk to Robert Sessions and others. But how would you describe him as a person and as administrator, and as a contributor to the development of TVA?

MR. WILSON: That is a difficult one because of Dr. Morgan's popularity in the Tennessee Valley.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) The reputation he brought with him into the TVA, his wholehearted acceptance by the rural people, the farm people particularly, I think, was his greatest contribution to TVA. It was his reputation he brought to TVA. I think it was a stablizing influence, a calming influence, causing more confidence of the people. I think it was very valuable and particularly in view of the contrasting personalities of Lilienthal and Arthur Morgan. They were foreigners. Harcourt was one of our people, although he was Canadian. By that time he was accepted; he was part of it. To me that was his greatest contribution to TVA.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of an administrator was he?

MR. WILSON: I did not have any great admiration for his administrative ability in TVA. I personally saw many little things, minor things, that I did not particularly agree with in his giving credit to the University of Tennessee for its accomplishments in the TVA program that I thought were rather undeserved. His aims were worthy, to involve local agencies in the program, but the flattery went a little

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) too far. As you know we had contracts with the University for services. In the population readjustment activities, which I apeak of with some knowledge, we had an organization within the TVA to help people readjust, to move out of reservoirs and to find new places. We also had a contract with the University for that same relocation service and counseling. They had people in the field. We were running into each other all the time in the field.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did your work overlap?

MR. WILSON: Our work overlapped greatly. Now in the Knoxville offices there was friction, misunderstanding, that so far as I know never got into print, was never acknowledged publicly. But internally there was some bitterness in their population readjustment activities and those of the TVA. In the field, however, there was always goodwill, understanding; there was a mutual acknowledgment of a duplication but we had many conferences in the field offices. Pat Kerr was their local representative in the Norris area. I

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) had the TVA angle. Pat Kerr and I had been friends before TVA; we continued to be friends. We often sat down and compared out notes, unknown to the people in Knoxville. In fact, we realized that we got along much better and our work went smoother. The families were affected better if we worked together rather than referring our problems into the Knoxville office. And we would sit down with our list of persons whom we were going to interview--and it was not known in the Knoxville office that we did that. We worked together very harmoniously there. But in my opinion the University got all the credit; TVA got none.

DR. CRAWFORD: How was that finally settled? Did the University contract end?

MR. WILSON: I don't know how it was finally settled. It continued throughout the readjustment program in the Norris area. My own work then became more land management and administrative assistance to our Knoxville office. The population readjustment program continued in the other reservoirs in which my personal contacts with the program were not quite as close,

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

although our division was handling the population readjustment activities. My personal participation was not close enough for me to be very much of a judge on that score. But the University work did a great deal of good, particularly in their follow-up, which TVA did not do. After the families had been removed and were relocated, as far as TVA was concerned, we were through with them. The continuation of that program, the adjustment, the advisory assistance they were getting, continued through the University, and that was very, very good.

The difference in the philosophy of this was largely that the University was seeking to make agricultural readjustments because people lived in rural areas. In the Norris area the University efforts tended toward readjusting these people on farms at some other place, when that was really only a small part of the problem. In numbers, I suppose, most of them made agricultural type of readjustments. But as far as the intensity of the problems were concerned, the problems related not to the people who were interested in farming or had ability to farm, but to poverty, to disease, to housing, to jobs. These people wanted jobs

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) rather than another opportunity to make a garden on somebody elses land. It was the tenant farmers who were the big problems in the removal.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you deal with them?

MR. WILSON: We attempted to know their wishes, to approach it from a case-study point of view, a social-worker point of view, in assessing all their assets: money, health, friends, opportunity, education, whatever they had that could be used to their advantage; find out what those were worth and then find out what their problems were. Was it illness, was it malaria, was it anemia, or other health problems? We often called in county physicians to examine these people. We sought medical assistance. We had many conferences with case workers and social workers in other counties. To begin with, a person could not move from one county into the other and be eligible for welfare. We worked out arrangements with the counties and finally got state approval on a policy of transferring people from welfare if TVA would authorize it. We

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) would certify that they were misplaced because of TVA operations in one county, then the other county would accept them on the new welfare rolls.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you use that often?

MR. WILSON: We used that very frequently. Many times we could find no one who wanted a new tenant on his farm. That made it very difficult to find a tenant farmer a new location--particularly if that person was very elderly or feeble. A few were simple-minded, and some of them had rather bad reputations for lawlessness. To find them places in other areas was quite difficult at times.

DR. CRAWFORD: At a guess, what percentage of the people that you relocated were tenants?

MR. WILSON: I would be afraid to state that. There are figures on that in the population readjustment reports. I used to work with those tables, but I don't know. I would just guess now forty percent.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you attempt to place any of them in activities other than tenant farming?

MR. WILSON: Yes. For a great many of our people we sought jobs. We had contracts with the employment offices, and of course WPA and all those government agencies were then working with transfers just as on the welfare rolls so that all persons could move to a WPA program in another area, in another county. Jobs, of course, were scarce at that time but there were a great many cases where people were referred to contractors in Knoxville, who were not TVA contractors. A good many of these people were employed by TVA by special dispensation. In other words because they were displaced families we gave them a preference for jobs on TVA, particularly the reservoir clearance work, and in the grave removal crews. In fact, when getting to the grave removal crews, it was an essential thing with the local people. Again that was one of the solutions to the criticism we had when the CCC boys came in. Perhaps I am going off on a tangent here. The grave removal program came at the same time that the CCC program was

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) coming in, and there were some CCC camps established in the general Norris area. There was a great fear; in fact this statement was made many times: "We Protestants don't want a bunch of New York Jews coming in here and digging up our dead--handling them--we won't have it." One of the solutions, one of the assurances that we gave them then was that no CCC boy would ever move any graves from TVA property. Even though they were camped on TVA land, that would have been a resource for TVA. But it would have been a disasterous one in the conduct of this program.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have . . .

MR. WILSON: We hired only local people to move the graves.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have much resistance on the part of people moving at all?

MR. WILSON: It is a relative matter. From most of them I would say no, not in numbers of people. There were a great many instances though.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

From all of the TVA project areas prior to 1950, we moved perhaps thirty-thousand people in perhaps fifteen thousand families. A great many of these people that we moved lived singly, although there were many large families. In the Norris area there were close to three thousand families and fourteen thousand persons. In all of that number there were only five removals in the Norris area that had to be done by eviction, and I had a crew of eighteen workers in the operation readjustment work. About eight or nine of those were interviewers, people who tried to persuade the people to go out and tried to help them find a place to go. Others were truck drivers under contract, not employees, who removed the personal belongings of those who could not pay for it themselves. In other words, if TVA bought a man's property, it expected him to move himself. Even a tenant farmer, if the tenant farmer was reasonably prosperous and could afford to do it himself, was expected to do so.

But there were literally hundreds of tenant families who had no resources to make a move even if there were places to go. In

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) those cases we employed trucks, truck drivers, and workers to help them round up their cattle, their chickens and pigs, put them in trucks and hauled them to their new place. The five evictions (I think I should not go into that too much), but there are so many interesting stories. I personally handled all the five evictions. I did not want to ask any of the employees on my staff to handle that. When a case got to the point where all of our efforts to persuade had been exhausted, I took over the case myself. I would rather not go into that now. Really, I don't have time, among other things. There are good stories, however.

DR. CRAWFORD: All right, sir. What sort of places did you look for in finding new homes?

MR. WILSON: Usually we started with, and my greatest resource was, "do you have a relative somewhere outside this reservoir area who would be willing to accept you?" It was family first, friends second. In that case many times we learned of brothers or cousins who had not seen each other maybe for ten or fifteen years. They

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) would say, "I have heard that I have a cousin living in Fentress County." We would get his name and would write to that person. Quite often we would go to see that person before we would take the family. We would go ourselves to see that person and say, "you have a relative in the Norris area who will have to move. Do you have a place where you can accept him on your property?" That was fairly successful and I believe our single greatest resource was family outside of the area.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were they often accepted by family members at other places?

MR. WILSON: I would say yes, often.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did this sometimes cause hardships to those who accepted them?

MR. WILSON: I am sure that it did; and particularly hardships for large families with many children. And we had some people who, just like people of ours, didn't like to work. We had a great many people who were in the moonshining and bootlegging business. We actually moved stills.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) We pretended not to know it, but we did. And in fact, I have taken some people to find new locations and the first thing they looked for was a good still site. I can cite you four families immediately that come to mind, four incidents in which I personally went with families to find new homes and they were particularly interested in good still sites.

DR. CRAWFORD: And the TVA truck occasionally moved their stills for them?

MR. WILSON: Yes, we did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you try generally to place them in the same sort of . . .

MR. WILSON: We had a (excuse me for anticipating) rule that we would make no moves unless it was at least as good as they had before. No relocation was acceptable unless it was as good. Now, "being as good" covers a lot of territory. Economic opportunities, schools, friends, trading centers were the primary things we looked for. Did they live near the store and the school? Did the roads,

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) job opportunities in this new place compare favorably with those in the immediate area you left?

There were very few instances where we would say we failed. There were a few cases, particularly right at the last, where we did not have time to work further with these people. The water in the lakes was rising. These people had to go. We had some of them almost at the point of persuasion, but the waters were coming up so fast that we had to make a sudden move. We, in a few cases, got tent platforms and tents from the rural rehabilitation program. We had some army surplus tents and we moved a few families just outside the reservoir and into these tents.

DR. CRAWFORD: While you continued to look, then?

MR. WILSON: We never abandoned them when they were so moved. I don't believe that anyone ever lived in those tents more than five or six months, but that particular winter of '35, I guess it was--yes '35 winter, '35 and '36--some of them suffered because of having to live in tents. I mean that they were not

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) comfortable, and that is regrettable.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you do a follow-up study on these people to see how they were adjusting later?

MR. WILSON: That is where the University Extension Service did a very good job, I think. We had cases, of course--these get into the anecdotal state--where people moved from one reservoir to another and found themselves so well off that they wanted to move into another new reservoir area where they could sell again. I know one family, Dixie Miller's family, that moved to three reservoirs intentionally, so that TVA would buy them out and move them and help them adjust. And the man had plenty of money; he was well-to-do.

I heard it said, and I say this because it pleases me, perhaps, that our population readjustment and grave removal activities were the best thing TVA ever did. We did enough follow-up ourselves to believe honestly that ninety-five percent of our people were successfully removed in the sense that they were better off economically, culturally, educationally, and in the opportunities they

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) had than they were when they left the reservoir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you believe that they felt this to be true?

MR. WILSON: I am almost certain they did. After I moved my office to Knoxville, for example, one of the five forceful removals involved a woman and several children. (It is pretty common knowledge that she was a woman who had a house full of illegitimate children.)--We moved her into a tent just outside the Norris reservoir area. It was a forcible removal in which there was armed resistance. The newspapers made a particular case of it in that after the family was removed, TVA workers returned and set fire to the house. The newspaper photographers were there. They had pictures of our moving the family out of the house, loading them on a boat, and the burning house in the background, when actually there were twenty-four hours between the two, but it made a good story. We were subject to many cases of that kind.

The story has a sequel. After we had moved her, just a few months later, she came

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

to Knoxville by bus--came to the office--came in the door carrying a baby, and said, "Mr. Wilson, I just want you to see this. My new baby." She said, "you took on so over my other children that I thought you would be glad to see this one. You know I was carrying it when you moved me out of the reservoir. I just thought you would be glad to see it." Well, I was very happy to see it. I was happy to see her. When she left she said, "I just want you to know that I have no hard feelings against TVA. That was the only thing to do and I know why you had to do it, and I just want you to know that I am your friend." And with that she left. I have never seen her again. Soon after that I learned that she had, before the child was born, moved into a small but comfortable house in Campbell county.

Another incident where we had armed resistance--I had to take a pistol out of a man's hand because he was aiming it at me. The Deputy Marshal came in a little bit too late to help but he got hold of two guns that were in the room. It was really a rough case. We moved the family out. He absolutely refused

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

to go where we wanted him to go. He had a son who came to me and said, "I'll be glad to have dad and my family" (this was a married son) "come here on my place, but he won't come." We finally agreed with the son that we would move his parents to the roadside in front of the son's house. He said, "all Dad has to do then is walk across the road into my house if he wants to." The father didn't know that this conversation had taken place. We moved that family, the man in handcuffs. We moved all of his materials to the side of the road in front of the house. We set up a tent on a wooden platform on the son's property into which this man could move if he wished, and it was within fifty feet of where we put the materials. There was an empty tent but he would not move into it. The man vowed that he would kill me if he ever saw me again. He was naturally disturbed and angry.

A month or two later I drove by that place. In fact we had people driving by every once in a while just to see if he was still there or if he had moved. He finally moved into another house. He did not use the

MR. WILSON:
(Cont'd)

tent, but I came by to get the tent that he had left there. He had taken it down and it was stored somewhere about the house, so I didn't know what to do. It was not in sight, so I went into the son's house to get the tent and he said, "well, Dad has the tent." I said, "well, I must have it back. I need it." He said, "you'll find Dad on the road somewhere. He left here with a team not long ago." I drove on down the road, saw a team coming toward me and I stopped my car and he stopped his wagon. I got out of the car and he got out of the wagon, came down, but he crossed to me with his hand outstretched and said, "hello, Mr. Wilson. I am glad to see you. I have got that tent down there at the house. I guess you want it back." I said, "yes, John. That's what I came for, and to see how you are." He said, "Mr. Wilson, I was the biggest damned fool that ever lived. Here I was employed by the TVA; I was working on reservoir construction. Why didn't you fire me?" I said, "the thought did occur to me but I could not hold the fact that you were holding out on us about moving against your employment because you were a good foreman--

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) reservoir foreman." He was dong a good job; he was a good foreman. I said, "I could not hold that against you so I did not say anything to your supervisors and you are still working for TVA." Well, he appreciated it, apologized, and said, "if you will follow me back to the house I will get the tent for you." We went back to his house. He offered me a cup of coffee and I sat down with him and his wife, drank the coffee, he helped load the tent into the back of my car, and then I drove off. I think that those little cases, to me, illustrate a fact that we didn't do such a bad job.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a difficult job, I know.

MR. WILSON: It was a difficult job, but people like people basically. They could see the inevitability of TVA and what it was going to do. It was a bigger power than they could control, and our job was to get them to adapt themselves to change.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was anyone ever injured in cases of resistance? You had to face armed people, I know.

MR. WILSON: No personal injury that I know of to anyone. In my book that I mentioned, Families of the Norris Area, I speak particularly of a Rice family. The most heart-rending case that I know of was in the moving of the Rice family. Mrs. Rice (I tell the story there; I won't repeat it now) was an elderly person who did not want to leave. It was not a forced removal; it was a final persuasion for them to move, plus the assistance in finding a delightful farm home for them. She died thirty days after they moved her. And if there was ever a case of a person dying from disappointment and grief, I think this must have been the case.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why were people so reluctant, in some cases, to leave? Was it family attachment to a home, or was it a feeling that they were not getting a fair exchange?

MR. WILSON: Much was said about not getting a fair exchange. Often I felt that this was not factual, and they knew that it was not factual, because we could show them another farm they could buy for less money that was just as good,

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

although it was used as a reason. They did not want to move. "You are not paying me enough money." In a very few cases that was probably true. In most cases I think it was not true. I think the bitter reluctance and the greatest difficulty was with the elderly people for sentimental reasons, such as Mrs. Rice. I can't think of her first name now. I think it was Sophronia. (Post: It was actually Nancy.) She said, "I was born in the house you see over thar on that hill. I look out this window and here is the cemetery where my parents and my grandparents are buried. I can see their tombstones from this window. I married and I have been living in this house for fifty years. I don't want to see new places; I don't want to have any new experiences. I just want to sit right here. And I want to die here and I know they will carry me right up there and put me in the grave--the ground upon this hill." I said, "do you like new clothes, pretty clothes?" She said, "what I have got on I spun myself." And she did; she had on homespun. She said, "does that answer you?" I said, "in a way." But

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

I said, "don't you like to see new places? Do you ever travel around?" She said, I used to but I don't anymore, and I don't want to." She said, "I don't want anything except to stay right here." My next line of attack was, "TVA is trying to make a better life for people. We think the control of floods, the retirement of submarginal lands--low-cost electricity and other things TVA is trying to bring about will be good for everybody. You may have heard this from Dr. McAmis or some others, but at that time it was, "retirement of submarginal land, plus electricity will make life easier for people." Well, the whole story of a better life, not for you alone but for others, had grown. "TVA is a fact. It is here; it is backed by most people. Most people are for it. It has to come. Now can we make the removal as easy as possible for the sake of others?" That was the most telling argument. She said, "if it will make other people happy, if it is better for the others, I am willing to go." And I turned to her husband and I said, "Uncle Rufe, are you willing to go?" He said, "if Sophronia will go, I will go." And the next week they moved.

DR. CRAWFORD: You found another good place for them, I suppose?

MR. WILSON: Yes, in fact theirs is a case where the Extension Service actually took the Rices, Mr. Rice, Uncle Rufe and his daughter, and located a very nice farm for them. Incidentally, the daughter later came to visit me several times. After her mother died, which was thirty days after they moved, she came to see me to talk about her mother. And she said that her mother died of disappointment, but she said, "I did want you to know that I don't hold it against you. It had to be done." A little bit later, a month or two later, the same daughter came in and introduced me to her fiancé and said, "we want to be married and we would like to be married in the old mill in Norris." Uncle Rufe gave me that mill, personally. He would not give it to TVA. He would not give it to the University. He would not give it to the Park Service for the CCC camp. He had an offer to sell; someone wanted to buy it. I am somewhat historically minded myself; I was interested in its preservation. And I asked

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

him if he wasn't interested in its preservation as the Rice Mill, because it had been in the family since 1798. He said, "no, I don't owe TVA nothing. I wouldn't give anything to the University." He didn't like universities and he thought they were a luxury that the public couldn't afford. It was supported by taxation and his taxes went to support it, and that was as far as he was going with the University. It finally came down to this and he said, "Mr. Wilson, would you accept it?" I said, "yes, but what will I do with it?" He said, "I don't care what you do with it." I said, "if I put it up on TVA land, but call it the Rice Mill, would that still be all right?" He said, "if I give it to you, you can do with it whatever you want to, on the condition that you reerect and keep it as the Rice Mill. I don't want you to sell it or destroy it." And I said, "I will take you up on that." I said, "now you have to sell the property here." At that time he hadn't sold his land, he hadn't accepted the price offered. I said, "if TVA has to condemn this property then you don't have the right to move that mill. TVA is

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) going to buy the mill from you if it has to go in condemnation. But if you are willing to sell it, then TVA will give you the privilege of moving the mill. You can do with it what you want to." That influenced him to sign the contract to sell. With his contract to sell, he said, "now the mill is mine. I give it to you." And so I started the ball rolling and got nowhere with TVA, whatsoever, in moving the mill. I went to the National Park Service, got their CCC boys to agree to holp move it. I called my truck drivers, who were moving families, into my office and I asked them to volunteer their services and their trucks in moving it. TVA architects went up and marked every log in the old mill and took pictures and so forth. The CCC boys helped tear it down. My truck drivers hauled it down to Norris. Then TVA got interested after I had moved it out. And so it was reerected just below the Norris Dam, and it is still known as the Rice Mill. No papers were ever signed on that. It was just moved.

DR. CRAWFORD: Can you tell me something about the cemetery removal, Mr. Wilson? What problems did you face, how did you handle that?

MR. WILSON: We gave every relative of a known grave, the person buried in that grave, one of three choices. He could leave the grave as is, let the water cover it, or let it be isolated. It might be above the water; it might be on an island or something. We would do nothing if he wanted us to do nothing. The second alternative was that we would give him forty dollars with which he could hire an undertaker. And we had some undertakers who saw that as a great business opportunity, and so they solicited business throughout the area. TVA would give the person forty dollars and let him make his own removal by anybody that he wanted to. All we asked was that we know of that removal and make a record of it. Not only where it came from, but where they took it, too, because TVA was going to have to answer to where it was moved. That was the only condition that we put upon it. The other, the third alternative, was that if they wanted us to, we would make the removal and make the reinterment at any place they said, within a fifty-mile radius.

We then helped a great many church organizations to buy and replace--build new cemeteries.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) The construction divisions of TVA planned, and graded the new cemeteries and staked them out, and so forth. Now, incidentally, when it came to the grave removal program there was a committee of five persons in charge of that activity. There was a lawyer to advise on the legality of it and there was a big question, but I don't think it is up to me to go into the legality question. There was a very critical and unique problem there because the State Supreme Court had ruled that "the wheels of commerce must stop at the grave," and TVA was in opposition, in violation, of that ruling of the Supreme Court.

Then we had an engineer, John Barksdale, as a member of the committee with Harry Wiersema as chairman. Incidentally, I hope Harry Wiersema is one of your contacts.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, he is.

MR. WILSON: Yes, definitely. Harry Wiersema and Barksdale from engineering, someone from the land division (the land purchasing division), the attorney from our Legal Department and

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) myself representing Dr. Morgan in public relations. We were the committee to handle all grave removal work. So the engineering forces built new cemeteries on land never owned by TVA, to which these bodies could be moved. Quite often they were moved to private cemeteries or to friends homes on adjoining lands, and so on. We assured people that there would be no CCC boys or foreigners to move their dead. We employed our own crews. We hired a local superintendent for grave removal, who was the father of one of the vice presidents of one of the banks, Curtis Allen's father. The thing was handled with these men trained always to be respectful. Although the government was moving these bodies it is a sacred thing to the people. We provided cars to bring the people to the cemeteries, to watch the removal, and then we allowed them to accompany us in our trucks as we hauled the bodies to the new place. TVA provided a new burial box. We removed whatever we found. Sometimes it was just like black soil. Sometimes there were a few nails, or a buckle or something of that kind in it. It went all the way from that to

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

well-formed bodies that had calcified or had the appearance of being dead just a few days, although they may have been dead for forty years. There were all ranges and I took a great many photographs, most of which have disappeared now. Also, Mr. Allen or members of his work crews took many photographs. The men were very careful in removing all the things they found. With trowels they picked up all the things and put them in the new burial boxes. The boxes were nailed together in the view of the relatives. TVA then provided, in all cases, a marker of some kind. Most of those graves had no monuments in the usual sense. If there was a monument TVA, of course, moved the monument and reset it at the new grave site but otherwise had a little brass or copper, grave marker on which we recorded the name, the removal date, and so forth. Those records of grave removal were then filed in the University of Tennessee and are, supposedly, in the University of Tennessee Library now. And one set was kept by TVA. TVA encourages the public, who still want information on that, to go to the University where they can get it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was this generally well accepted by the people involved?

MR. WILSON: Yes, it was. Again I think we had many more compliments than we did criticisms. I say this, well, with some reluctance, but even the Baptist Association of Campbell County was very complimentary of the job TVA was doing. One result was that the undertakers who solicited business and wanted forty dollars, I don't believe, moved two percent of the graves. TVA removed ninety-eight percent of all graves that were moved. At first, I know, the undertakers had signed up fifteen or twenty percent of the people who had agreed for them to do it. But upon their watching TVA do it, and how it was done, they canceled their contracts with the undertakers and came back to TVA and said, "I want you to move our dead."

DR. CRAWFORD: Roughly, how many graves were moved? Just as an estimate, and how many cemeteries did you have to relocate?

MR. WILSON: It would be a wild guess there. I have notes but I don't have such notes with me.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) I would say perhaps a hundred cemeteries in the sense of anywhere from two graves up to hundreds of graves. There must have been several hundred. There were occasionally isolated graves, just one or two in a spot. Very few were left. At first a great many people decided to leave them, and then changed their minds. There are a few cemeteries now in very isolated places that are very difficult to get to, that remain in the areas.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems to me this plan was very successful. Was it carried out without much change in the other reservoir areas?

MR. WILSON: Yes. The same policies prevailed throughout the grave removals all the time that I was with them. And I think the word got around and I am pretty sure, I am certain, that the job of grave removal was much easier in the succeeding reservoirs.

DR. CRAWFORD: You learned a great deal in this first experience, didn't you?

MR. WILSON: We did, definitely. We learned a lot about buying land too. I was not in the

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) Land Purchase Division except in connection with my public relations work. I often accompanied land buyers to these people's homes, particularly where we had rough going. I went more as an observer and I think we learned a great deal there in dealing with people.

DR. CRAWFORD: What position did you hold? What was your career with TVA after going back into this work?

MR. WILSON: My work as Aide in Public Relations, which included participation in the grave removal program, preceded my employment as Population Readjustment Supervisor, that is, for the removal of the living, as we spoke of earlier. When that was substantially completed I returned to Knoxville from the Norris area and became Administrative Assistant to Mr. Louis Allen. He first came to TVA in the reservoir clearance work, and then became Director of the Department of Reservoir Property Management. I was employed as his Administrative Assistant and at the time Mr. Crittenden came in as the, well, budget officer,

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) or accountant would be a better term rather than comptroller or anything of that kind--accountant for the division. We began then leasing and licensing the use of TVA properties. My work had largely to do with the letting of contracts and licenses for people to graze their cattle on TVA reservoir lands, the moving of houses, and the selling of the remaining houses that were on the land. It was surplus and we wanted the land cleared off. There was the settling of disputes concerning the property lines, the beginning of a Malaria Control Program, and then, of course, this division took on the responsibility for Public Safety Service. And for a long time there I was the staff advisor on the Public Safety Program. Then the Camp and Village Operations were taking over--that's the dormitories, the feeding and so forth. From the Administrative Assistant position I became Administrative Officer, which was just a promotion in that work, and then became Specialist in Property Management, dealing largely with the commercial and industrial uses of TVA lands as opposed to the agricultural and forestry.

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

We had on our staff advisors in forestry and advisors in agriculture and in recreation. But, as the additional reservoirs were constructed, especially on the main river dams and reservoirs, more and more commercial uses--boat docks were installed to be leased and licensed. I was the principal liaison between our division and the legal division of TVA. I drafted most of the contracts that TVA used initially. Of course, they were all approved by the legal department, but I became known as the contract officer for the Reservoir Properties Department, leasing lands for various purposes, relocating telephone lines, railroad sidings--that kind of thing. Later, I became Chief Adminstrative Officer, and during the war the great burden was obtaining material and handling personnel problems--replacements. And as a soldier came back, of course, he had preference--veteran preference for jobs. And it was a very difficult and an emotional job, quite often, to replace good men with people who were entitled to a job simply because they had it before they went into the service--not on a basis of efficiency or ability to

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) do the job. I think that term "merit", however--perhaps they merited the job because of their war service, but it was a government policy.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a difficult period. Did you have to make much turnover then? Did you have to replace many people?

MR. WILSON: We replaced a great many, especially in our Public Safety Service Division, and personally I became a victim of that same policy myself in TVA. I was replaced by a veteran. He left from another department, yet he happened to have the same classification as mine. He was their Chief Administrative Officer. Just before this man came back that department discontinued their job as Chief Administrative Officer. They abolished the position, so when he came back I happened to have the one position with the same grade. This man had been employed with TVA about six months in a division that had very little relationship to the kind of work we did in our division, but the title was the same and he had the right to displace me, after nearly twenty years.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that was . . .

MR. WILSON: I don't grudge. No complaints about that. I was disappointed but it was a law, and I had been for a year or more enforcing it against tremendous opposition, even in my own department. For example, the Property Manager at Wilson Dam just refused to re-employ somebody because he was a veteran. He balked at letting some of these good men go and it was my job to insist that he take these returning veterans, and he felt that I was imposing people upon him. In other words, I had been on the other side of the boat insisting that TVA take back veterans. That was the law and we had to do it, and so when TVA cut me I had no leg to stand on. I had to go.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you leave service with TVA at that time, sir?

MR. WILSON: Yes. I went to the Department of the Army with a two-grade increase in salary and I served as Community Services Advisor for the Third Army.

DR. CRAWFORD: How long were you with the Third Army?

MR. WILSON: About two years in that job. There I more or less cut my own throat. I was asked by the Adjutant General to justify the position. The President had ordered a cut throughout the army, cutting down on all nonessential work. And as I viewed this particular job as advisor on Community Service, it was one that could be done away with for budgetary reasons.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you advised them to that effect?

MR. WILSON: And I advised them to that effect. And as a result, the entire program of Community Service in the army throughout the world was discontinued.

DR. CRAWFORD: What year was that, sir?

MR. WILSON: That was in '53.

DR. CRAWFORD: And where did you go then?

MR. WILSON: I came back to Knoxville and went into

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd)

the contracting business. I bought some land and developed my own subdivision and built houses until 1957. I was offered an opportunity to build a Methodist home for the retired in Maryville. I served as consultant on that for awhile without pay, and decided that I would not put a bid on it. I was interested enough in the program that I would be glad to promote it, coordinate the work in the employment of architects and so forth, oversee the construction, and raise money to build it, provided that I could stay on as Associate Administrator.

In the Methodist Church we had a bishop at that time who insisted that the administrator of any church institution had to be a minister. He could not be a lay person. I was not a minister and never intended to be. I accepted that job and threw out all the plans that had been made up to that time, started fresh with new architectural plans and stayed with it until that building was completed and in operation. I was Acting Administrator. The Administrator was in an institution for the mentally ill the whole time, so I got no credit for it. His name

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) was always given as the Administrator, but, in fact, he was never there. Having completed that job successfully, I was offered a position to go to Buffalo, New York and build one twice as big. I started there with nothing but the idea. They had to borrow money to pay my salary the first two years I was there. I put on a successful campaign, coordinated with the FHA. Finally, however, we threw out the FHA, went to the local banks and persuaded them to put up the money. We built a beautiful home that was rated (get this in the record now) as the outstanding home in New York state.

DR. CRAWFORD: That is quite a compliment.

MR. WILSON: I thought it was and I praise myself a little on that. After that one was completed and operating, I stayed on as Administrator for one year. I liked Tennessee so well (I was nearing retirement age anyway), so I retired and came to Knoxville.

DR. CRAWFORD: What year was that, sir?

MR. WILSON: That was in '65. Here I was retired for two years playing in the mountains, building myself a lodge up on top of Chilhowee Mountain, and I had a serious operation during the same time, which laid me up for a few months. Then for a few months I was Executive Director for the Fort Loudoun Association, an interesting job until a political turnover made it intolerable and I resigned. I was doing nothing at the time the position of Business Manager and Treasurer of this church became vacant, and I was asked if I would work here. I agreed to work on a three-day basis at sixteen-eighty a year because I would get my social security and I could earn up to sixteen-eighty without losing that social security. So I am employed at sixteen hundred and eighty dollars a year and working six or more days per week.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you have had a very varied career, Mr. Wilson, and I appreciate very much these memoirs that you have given of your experiences.

MR. WILSON: I relish the memories. Let me say I do. I have no regrets. TVA did a tremendous lot for me. I learned more, I became more educated,

MR. WILSON: (Cont'd) I associated with intelligent people--an opportunity I would never have had in any other place. It broadened my vision. My whole personality, I think, profited tremendously by my association with TVA. I have no ill will against TVA. I think it is a great institution.

DR. CRAWFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.